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Research Note

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MONTANA CHRISTMAS TREE EXPORTS DECLINE FOR THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR

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ABSTRACT

Authoritative data on shipments by rail and truck of Montana Christmas trees show a consistent decline for the past 3 years. This is largely the result of severe attacks by disease and insects, which damaged the appearance of harvestable trees. Shipments in 1962 are compared with those for 1961. Rail and truck shipments for the past 20 years are summarized.

Christmas tree shipments from Montana[1] have fluctuated widely since 1942, the year of the first survey, from varied causes--weather, markets, transportation, and damage by insects and diseases. Shipments generally increased from 1942 until 1956 but declined in 1957, when insect attacks severely damaged the appearance of harvestable trees. In 1958 this damage was compounded when epidemic diseases spread through part of the range of Douglas-fir, the principal Christmas tree species. As a result of all these factors, Christmas tree shipments in 1962 fell to the lowest number in 19 years.

The 2.2 million trees shipped in 1962 represent a 6-percent decrease from 1961 shipments[2] and a 46-percent decrease from 1956,[3] the peak year. Comments gathered

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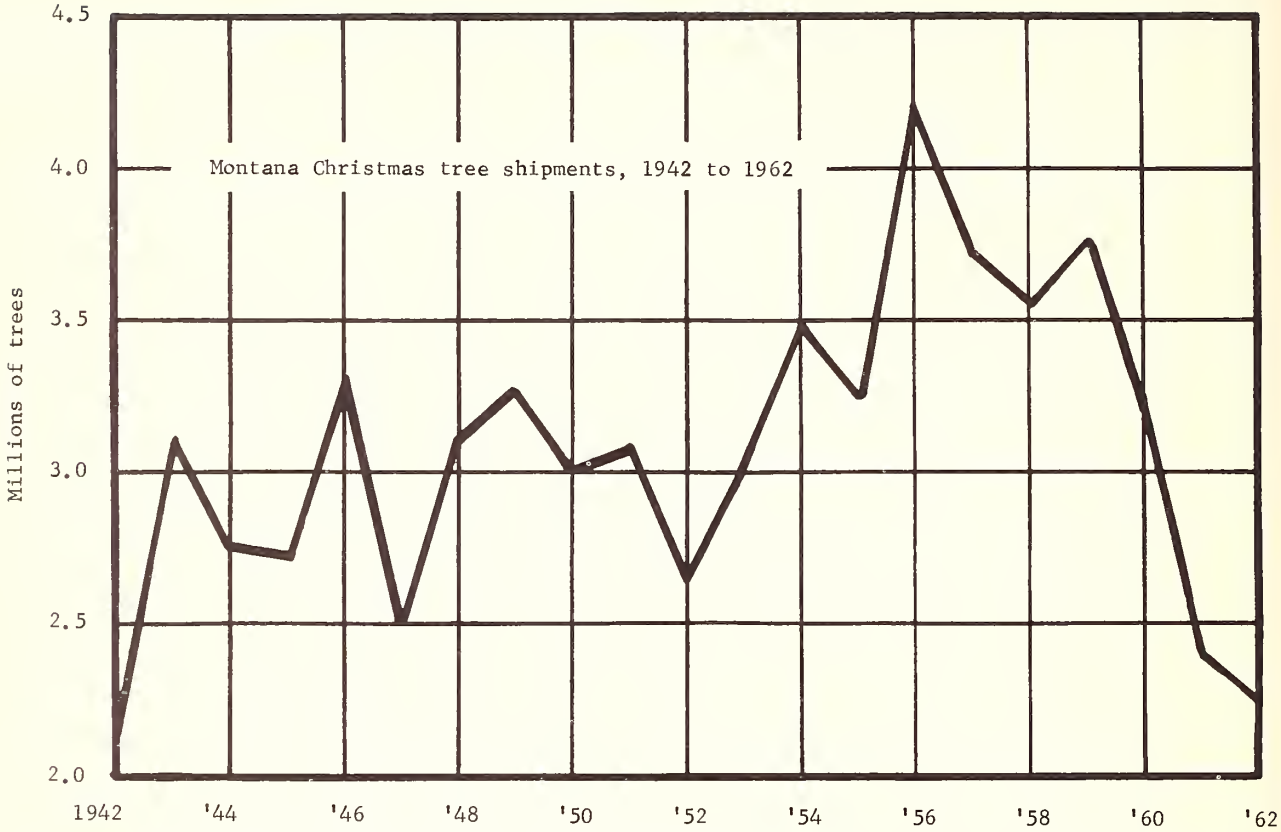
[1] This report deals only with shipments of trees to markets outside Montana rather than total Christmas tree production for the State. Each of the transstate railway lines supplied data for trees shipped by rail; the State Forester, the University of Montana, and the National Forests supplied figures on truck shipments.

[2] Wilson, Alvin K. Severe decline in Montana Christmas tree shipments. Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station Research Note 98, 4 pp. 1962.

[3] Wilson, Alvin K. A new high in Montana Christmas tree shipments. Intermountain Forest and Range Experiment Station Research Note 44, 4 pp. 1957.



from several official sources in Montana indicate that demand for Christmas trees in 1962 exceeded the supply. Damage by insects and disease in Lincoln County alone, as reported by the Kootenai National Forest, kept an estimated 70,000 trees from being harvested in 1962. Reports from other National Forests indicate that similar losses occurred in all Christmas tree producing areas of western Montana.[4]

Most of the losses reported by the National Forests were due to insect damage. As in previous years, Douglas-fir needle midge, spruce budworm, and in some instances the Cooley spruce gall aphid, were responsible for reduction in quality of Douglas-fir. Douglas-fir needle midge, present throughout the range of Douglas-fir, is epidemic in the principal harvest areas (in and around the Kootenai National Forest) and causes the major losses to the industry. Spruce budworm is a destructive factor in the Lolo and Bitterroot National Forests and the Garnet Range, east of Missoula, where Christmas tree harvest has been less than in the northern counties. It appears to be spreading northward. This insect has practically eliminated the small commercial Christmas tree operations east of the Continental Divide. For the second consecutive year the School of Forestry at Montana State University was unable to harvest trees from University lands near Missoula because of spruce budworm infestation, which was more severe this year than in 1961. Forest entomologists see no immediate indication of decline in populations of these insects.

[4] West of the Continental Divide.

Table 1.--Shipments of Christmas trees by rail and truck from Montana, by counties, 1962

County	Rail shipments	Truck shipments	Total	Percent
	Thousands of trees			
Lincoln	727	195	922	41
Flathead	622	272	894	40
Lake	90	76	166	8
Sanders	100	21	121	5
Missoula	57	61	118	5
Others	0	28	28	1
Total	1,596	653	2,249	100

Table 2.--Rail and truck Christmas tree shipments from Montana, 1942-1962

Year	Rail shipments		Truck shipments		Total shipments
	Thousands of trees	Percent	Thousands of trees	Percent	
1942	2,139	97	65	3	2,204
1943	2,931	94	172	6	3,103
1944	2,636	96	120	4	2,756
1945	2,556	94	168	6	2,724
1946	2,867	87	432	13	3,299
1947	2,210	88	306	12	2,516
1948	2,731	87	392	13	3,123
1949	2,817	86	440	14	3,257
1950	2,693	89	325	11	3,018
1951	2,784	90	301	10	3,085
1952	2,375	90	270	10	2,645
1953	2,389	79	631	21	3,020
1954	2,760	79	723	21	3,483
1955	2,855	88	380	12	3,235
1956	3,349	80	847	20	4,196
1957	2,631	71	1,089	29	3,720
1958	2,470	69	1,098	31	3,568
1959	2,741	73	1,010	27	3,751
1960	2,237	70	963	30	3,200
1961	1,662	69	730	31	2,392
1962	1,596	71	653	29	2,249

The disease attacks on Christmas tree stock have diminished. Although losses due to Rhabdocline and Rhabdogloeum needlecasts ("Christmas tree blight") were reported, these chronic diseases have been declining for the past 3 years. Since needle dropoff occurs within 2 years after infection, much of the reported damage to the current harvest has resulted from past infestation. Research studies are attempting to discover antibiotics to control these diseases.

Production in the two principal counties, Lincoln and Flathead, increased over 1961 (5 percent and 10 percent, respectively), despite the heavy insect damage. However, these increases were more than offset by a marked decline in all other counties --especially in Missoula County, which produced only 48 percent of its 1961 production.

Table 3.--Rail shipments of Montana Christmas trees to leading markets, 1962 and 1961

State	1962		State	1961	
	Thousands of trees	Percent		Thousands of trees	Percent
Texas	361	23	Texas	394	24
Oklahoma	218	14	California	238	14
California	166	10	Oklahoma	218	13
Iowa	157	10	Iowa	166	10
Missouri	157	10	Kansas	152	9
Kansas	138	9	Missouri	147	9
Nebraska	76	5	Nebraska	81	5
Oregon	52	3	Illinois	71	4
Illinois	48	3	Louisiana	33	2
Others [1]	223	13	Others	162	10
Total	1,596	100	Total	1,662	100

[1] Includes 5,000 trees exported to Mexico.

Rail shipments in 1962 were the lowest of the 20-year period of record. These shipments were about 4 percent (66,000 trees) less than in 1961. Truck shipments declined 10.5 percent (77,000 trees) below 1961 figures.

In addition to rail shipments to 24 States in 1962, one carload of trees was exported to Mexico. The leading market States--Texas, Oklahoma, California, Iowa, and Missouri--accounted for 67 percent of all rail shipments.